




<p><i>Achievement: Knowing When to Push and When to Ease Up</i></p> <p>Dr. Jules Nolan President & CEO Phoenix School Counseling</p> 	 <p>CATHOLIC SCHOOLS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE</p>
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<p>Goals for Today</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Challenges parents face with academic support, especially in a high-achievement setting.• Equip parents with evidence-based strategies to motivate without overstepping• What REALLY predicts success? 	
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When to ease up: is the pressure too high?

- Students in high achieving schools are an “at risk” group
- Parents feel responsible for children’s achievement/success
- Parents feel like getting into a selective college is pivotal for future success
- Students feel like parents love them MORE when they are high achieving



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What’s so bad about pressure?

- Sending the signal to kids that you are so worried about their achievement that it is the first question you ask when you see them.
- Parents feel responsible for adolescent’s achievement
- Adolescents can get through this high pressure time with great achievement, then feel disillusioned – what was all this for?



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How to take down the pressure

- Best intervention for distressed child is to make sure the parent is resilient.
- Parent resilience depends on their own social supports
- Getting into a selective college is not related to future success
- Home is a reprieve: talk about what you love and admire about who they are, not what they achieve



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What to focus on Instead

- Work that feels meaningful
- Feeling Competent
- Relationships
- **Mattering** – the most important predictor of success and wellbeing



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Ways to “Matter”

- Your worth does not change whether you are bruised or broken
- Volunteer mandate – must commit to serve others, helps to “zoom out” and orient toward other’s challenges
- The amount of time parents spend with 8th and 9th graders directly impacts feeling of mattering
- Someone in your child’s community must depend on them for something
 - Chores
 - Helping neighbors
 - Caring for animals
 - Volunteering
 - Social justice



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Perfectionism

- Not a mental health disorder in DSM – but relates to anxiety
- Not wanting to fail (fear)
- One resulting problem is stopping taking risks or performing at all because of this fear
- Another problem is cheating and academic dishonesty
- Low self-regard masquerading as “high standards”



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Signs of Perfectionism

- Trouble completing assignments because the work is never “good enough”
- Intense anxiety surrounding the possibility of failure
- High sensitivity to criticism
- Extreme frustration when a mistake is made



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Characteristics of Perfectionism

- Holding themselves to unrealistically high standards
- Having a heightened sensitivity to flaws or mistakes
- Interpreting mistakes as failure
- Tending towards rigid all-or-nothing thinking.



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Other Signs of Perfectionism

- Procrastinating to avoid difficult tasks
- Self-critical, self-conscious, easily embarrassed
- Difficulty making decisions and prioritizing tasks
- Extremely critical of others.



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Connection to Anxiety

- Repetitive negative thoughts:
 - ruminate about past mistakes or worry about future failure.
- A low threshold of tolerance for discomfort:
 - Perfectionist behaviors are maladaptive strategies to avoid discomfort
- Frequent experience of stress:
 - Kids and teens with low distress tolerance tend to experience many situations as stressful



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More Connections to Anxiety

- A learned sense of helplessness/worthlessness:
 - Repeatedly failing to meet their unrealistically high standards reduces their confidence in their ability to perform.
- Avoidance as a coping strategy:
 - Trying to avoid the discomfort caused by perfectionism increases the potential for future anxiety.



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Low Motivation – When to Push

Motivation

- Internal vs. External
- Curiosity, avoiding losses, validation, identity
- For perfectionists, it's the outcome
- Celebrating the outcome more than the process sets you up for future failure
- What happens when reality of the outcome doesn't live up to expectation



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And... *more* strategies

Motivation

- In non-preferred activities, you need frequent, small rewards
- In times of stress and low motivation, you need to schedule pleasures
- Pomodoro method – work for 10 mins, break for 2
- Behavioral momentum – put on your workout clothes
- Look for inspiration – music, art, movement, nature, prayer, literature
- Get curious



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How ^{not} to Intervene

What doesn't work

- Punishing
- Over-praising
- Dismissing the distress/shaming
- Constant comforting
- Threatening
- Over-explaining
- Warning



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How to Intervene with Low Motivation

- Effective praise – avoid “you’re smart, a great athlete” and instead praise process – “you worked hard even when I could see you getting frustrated”
- “I saw you had success with that, how does that feel?”
- Praise “failure”.
- Examine your own beliefs about this. What model are you giving?
- Small consequence for not doing what they are supposed to do.
- Make things they take for granted, contingent on doing the thing. NO STRONG EMOTION from parent



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Tips to Motivate

- Highlight what is going right – where you focus your attention tends to GROW
- Remember that they are developing skills, not perfecting performance.
- Spend time talking about what interests them



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Tips to Motivate

- Discipline isn't what we "do to" them, it is what we hope to help them develop
- Model your own motivation around non-preferred tasks
- Criticism and comparison doesn't work and is counterproductive
- Teaching the "real outcomes" of life – do what you are supposed to do, you get rewards. Don't do them, you miss out
- Curiosity, identity, avoiding unpleasant outcome, validation – talk to them about these things.



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When it might be something more...

- When it interrupts their FUNCTIONAL performance
- When they lose interest in previously interesting activities
- Eating/sleeping is disrupted
- Adolescents who are irritable all the time...feel like you are walking on eggshells
- When they withdraw from friends, activities, interests



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Thank you!

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